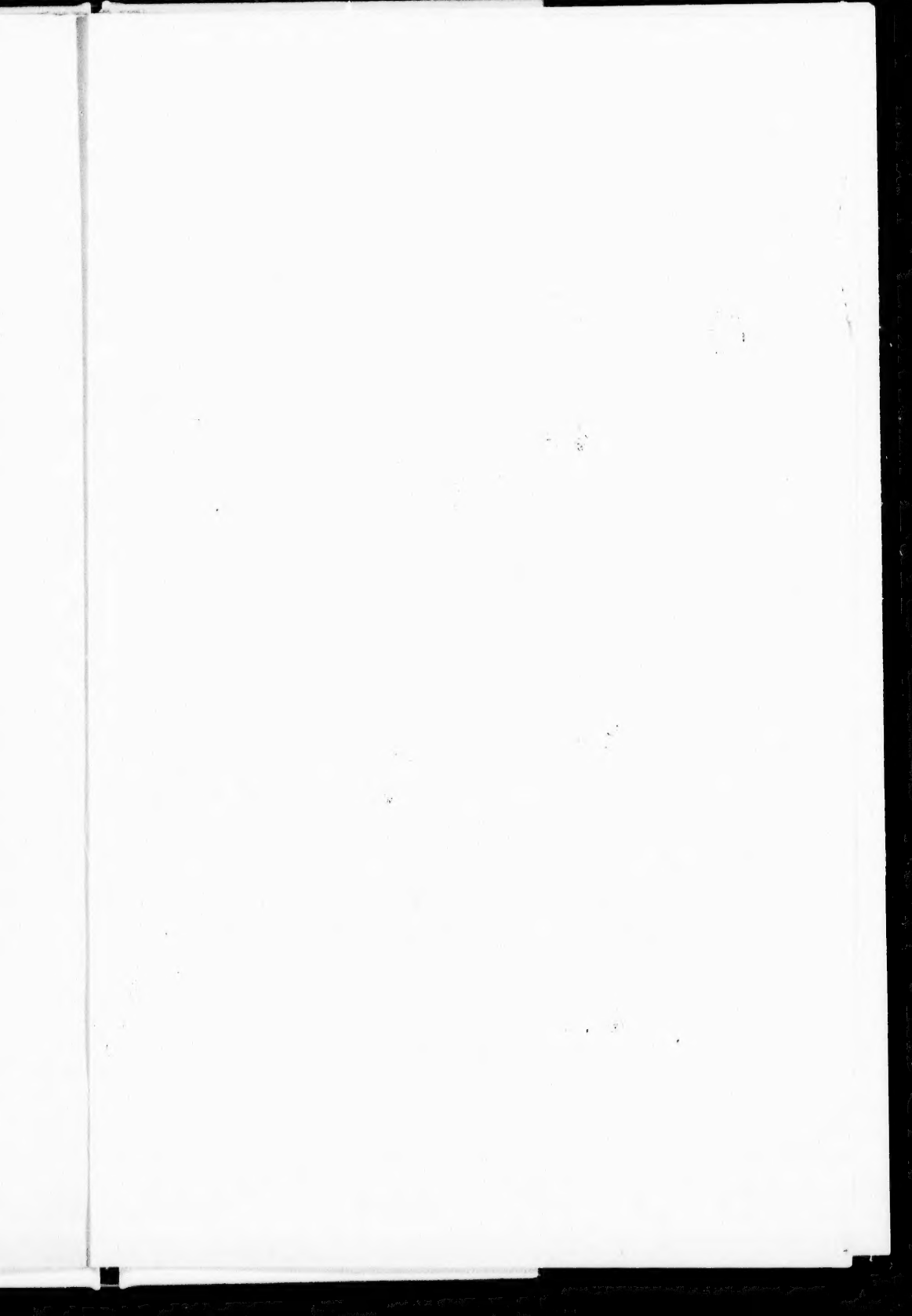
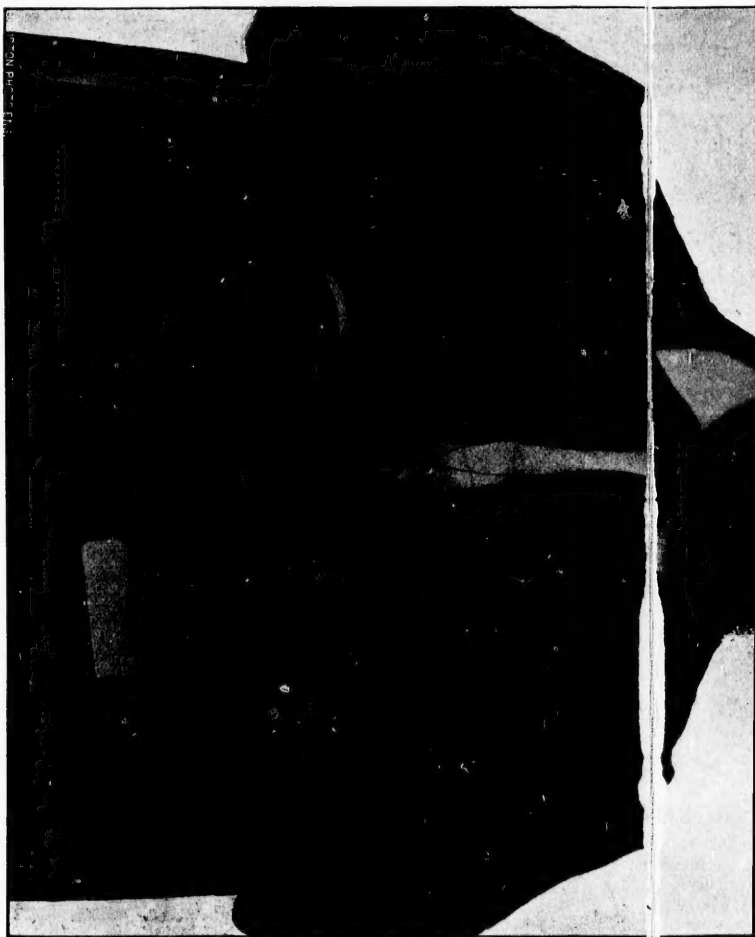
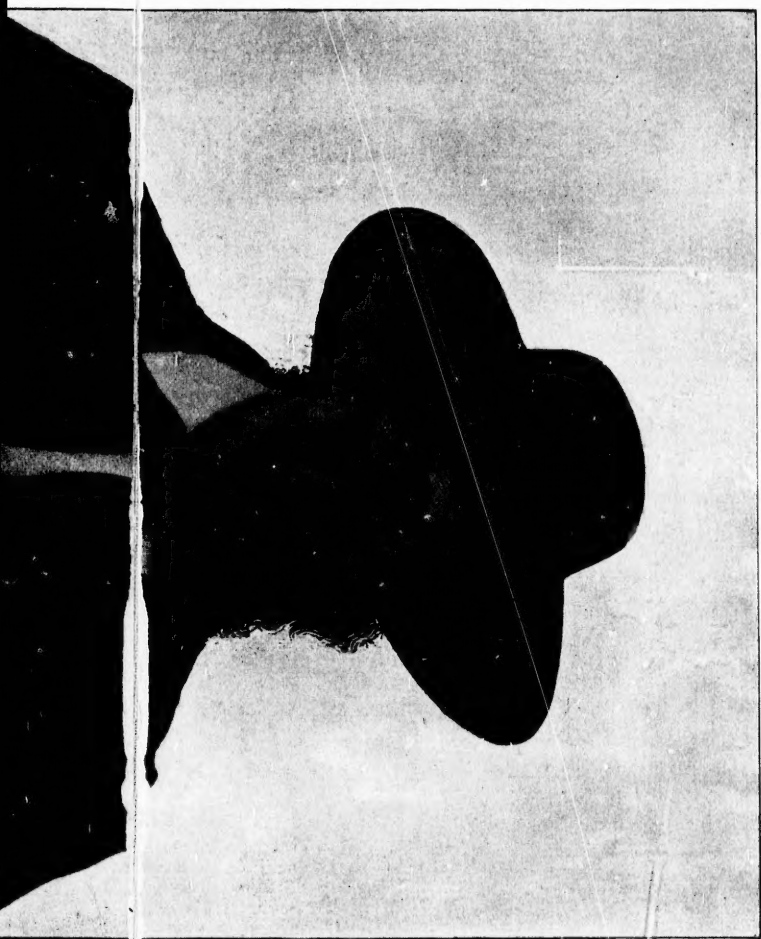


THE LATE SIR DANIEL WILSON, L.L.D.





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No. 10.

## THE LATE SIR DANIEL WILSON, LL.D.



WITH the life and career of the President of Toronto University, the public of Canada, are familiar, for at the time of his death, on the 6th of August last, the daily press of the country, published very full accounts. Sir Daniel Wilson was born in Edinburgh, on the 5th of January, 1816, and was the second son of Mr. Archibald Wilson, a prominent merchant of Auld Reekie. He received his education at the famous High School of that city, and in due time proceeded to the more famous University, where he greatly distinguished himself. Like his brother George, the chemist and professor, he early evinced a taste for science and letters. At the age of twenty-one, he went to London, taking up archaeology as a favorite pursuit, and performing literary work for the newspapers, magazines and reviews. Having a natural fondness for art, he devoted much of his time to drawing and engraving, becoming proficient in both departments, in a very short time. He returned to Edinburgh, continued his contributions to the press, assisted the Messrs. Black by writing many of the leading articles in the Encyclopædia Britannica, 8th edition, and edited, with conspicuous ability, the proceedings of the Scottish Antiquary. He loved to wander about the streets of old Edinburgh, and with all the enthusiasm of an

antiquarian, investigated every object of interest, with which he came in contact. The result of his labors found expression in 1847, in his remarkable volume, "Memorials of Edinburgh in the Olden Time," which he illustrated himself, many of his sketches being drawn on wood by his own hand, an art which he had acquired in England. A quarter of a century later, a second edition appeared, and in 1890, the revised edition, sumptuously illustrated, was issued. This work instantly gave him fame, but it was his Pre-historic Annals of Scotland, 1851, which drew the plaudits and encomiums of men high in the field of scientific research, and gave to him a name and a character, which remained with him to the last. In 1863, this able book appeared again, revised and enlarged. Hallam the historian declared it to be the most scientific treatment of the archaeological evidences of primitive history which had ever been written, an opinion which was shared by the most eminent scientists of the day. Among such leaders in the field of investigation, Dr. Wilson enjoyed an enviable place, while his position in all literary and educational circles was not less exalted. In 1853, through the good offices of Lord Elgin, influenced, it is said, by Hallam's statement, he was appointed professor of History and English Literature at University College, Toronto. From that date until his death, he has been identified with the growth

LE3 and development of higher education in Ontario. To trace its history and achievement, step by step, is to write the story of Dr. Wilson's life. He embarked on the duties allotted to him with zeal and vigor. He had been installed but a few months in his chair, when the Principalship of McGill University was offered him. High as the post was, however, he felt compelled to decline it. He worked with great industry and perseverance. His extraordinary tact and versatility, his varied accomplishments, his geniality and strong common-sense served him well, and he instantly became successful in the highest degree, as lecturer, examiner, and member of the Senate and Council of the University. His elucidation of the subjects belonging to his Chair was clear and convincing, and his manner of address was so pleasing, that he was never at a loss for an audience of delighted listeners. The right word to say came to him very readily. In addition to his college work, he devoted many hours to literature, ethnology, archæology and popular science, producing valuable papers and monographs on all these departments of intellectual development. To the various transactions of the learned bodies of the old and new worlds, he was a frequent and much-prized contributor, while his lectures before public institutions, his numerous writings in the press and in the serials, his contributions to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, and *Chambers's Encyclopædia* and the several books he contrived to publish from time to time, kept his name well to the front as an original and scholarly thinker. He found time too, to connect himself with such bodies as the Canadian Institute, the Young Men's Christian Association, the Ontario Teachers' Association, the Council of Public Instruction, the News Boy's Home (of which he was a founder), etc. The gentler sex had ever in him a warm friend of the cause of higher education of women. To the poor he was always kind, giving freely of his means, with the heart and sympathy of a philanthropist.

In 1881, on the death of Dr. McCaul, Professor Wilson was promoted to the Presidency of the University. The choice was a good one, and he soon gave evidence of his remarkable skill as an administrator and executive officer. Under his government the College made great strides in all its departments, and many students from all parts of Canada and the

United States were attracted to its walls. Women were admitted to the lecture rooms, and their number during the last half dozen years has increased rapidly. In favour of University federation, Dr. Wilson did his utmost to promote that laudable object, and lived long enough to witness the fulfilment of the greater part of his scheme. He saw, too, many colleges affiliate with his beloved university. Faith in her future he always had. In 1891, at Commencement Day, he said in an address: "We welcome an expansion of our resources in the realization of the long controverted scheme of university federation. A university embracing several well equipped colleges, stimulating each other in healthful and friendly rivalry, cannot fail to acquire additional strength thereby. I anticipate at no distant date, as a result of this union of our resources, the efficient organization of post-graduate work, such as cannot fail to largely increase the influence of this university as a centre of higher culture."

Always before the eyes of his students he kept in view the great moral truths. Kindly advice he ever gave to them, and all who came to him felt drawn by love and tender sympathy. In his youth, he was a companionable man. In his old age, there was no change in his relations with his fellows. To young and old the sweet simplicity of his nature was always present. On that commencement Day, to which reference has just been made, he said, turning to the host of bright young faces before him, the students of the year, who had just welcomed him with the song of "He's a jolly good fellow": "Your opportunities are exceptionally great. We seem to be at the near close of one great cycle in the intellectual life of the English race, and as we watch with eager expectancy for the promise of the new dawn, every environment is calculated to stimulate the rising generation to noble aspirations and unflagging zeal. Once before in the grand era of the Reformation, under another great Queen, the brilliant Elizabethan age shows forth in unparalleled splendor with its poetic idealist Spenser turning back wistfully to the age of chivalry and romance, and its Shakespeare, grandest of realists, mastering the supreme compass of humanity for all time. Once again, under wise and noble queenly rule, we have witnessed an outburst of genius in many respects recalling that of the Elizabethan age. But it too draws to its close. Of

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Browning now mingles his dust with the elder chiefs of song in the poet's corner of the great abbey, and there, too, a fitting place has been found for the memorial bust of New England's graceful lyrical poet, Longfellow. In the preparations already in progress for the fitting commemoration of a grander cycle, completing the revolving centuries since Columbus—400 years ago,—braved the mysterious terrors of ocean and revealed to Europe another world, the Poet Laureate has been invited to pen the ode that shall voice America's celebration of her new birth. But the veteran poet pleads the privilege of age. He has laid aside his singing robes. His lyre is unstrung. It seems in all ways as if another great era had run its course, and

"As in a theatre the eyes of men  
After a well graced actor leaves the stage,  
Are idly bent on him that enters next."

So we, not idly, but in anxious expectancy, watch for the promise of the new dawn."

In the compass of this sketch, which, owing to want of space, must be considerably abbreviated, it will not be necessary to dwell further on Dr. Wilson's university life, nor will it be deemed necessary to deal at length with his writings. He wrote many books. He was a true and melodious poet, and though "Spring Wild Flowers," was, as he used to say, a youthful production, it contained many verses of striking power and originality. In later life, good fruit continued to drop from his muse. He loved poetry and poets. His life of Chatterton is a charming study of the "marvellous boy," superior to David Masson's monograph on the same subject, more lovingly done, and richer in information. His essay on Caliban, or the missing link, is ingenious, critical, and full of lofty imagination. A curious volume, "The Right-hand; Left-handedness," growing out of papers read before the Royal Society of Canada, and the Canadian Institute of Toronto, was the last volume from his pen. It contains eleven chapters of very interesting data about the "dishonoured hand," for which history, the various sciences, literature and the scriptures, have been levied upon for allusions and exemplars. The great work of Dr. Wilson, however, is "Prehistoric man; researches into the origin

of civilization." On that book, his fame as an investigator, and scientist, will rest. It has not a dull page, though the subject is deep and often abstruse. Light is thrown on the dark places with a power little short of the magical, while the splendid literary style of the author,—often poetic, and always luminous,—gives to the work an attractiveness which compels attention. When the Blacks of Edinburgh decided to issue the ninth edition of their *Encyclopædia Britannica*, they did not forget their old friend, living in Toronto. They entrusted him with the articles on Archaeology, (pre-historic) Canada, Chatterton, Montreal, Ontario, Toronto, Robert Fergusson, Edinburgh, and several others. He was very proud at being asked to write the article on his native city, especially as he was living so far away from the scene. As he was the best authority on the subject, however, it was not singular that the publishers of the *Encyclopædia* demanded his pen.

When Lord Lorne founded, in 1882, the Royal Society of Canada, he called on Prof. Wilson to aid him in the task. He became the first president of section 11, which is concerned with English literature, history and archaeology. In 1885 he was unanimously elected president of that important body. The Transactions contain many valuable papers from his hand, and at the last annual meeting, held in Ottawa in May and June last, he read a most interesting and valuable paper on the law of copyright. The society ordered it to be printed.

At this meeting he was particularly bright and cheerful, though his face bore traces of fatigue and hard work. He had a kindly word for everyone, and in the discussions which came up on Dr. Patterson's papers on the Language of the Beothicks or Red Indians of Newfoundland, and Sir William Alexander and the Scottish attempts at the colonization of Nova Scotia; Prof. George Bryce's Assiniboine river and its forts, and Mr. R. W. McLachlan's Annals of Nova Scotian currency, he had much to say of a helpful character. The centre of a little group consisting of Sir William Dawson, Principal Grant, Dr. Sandford Fleming, Dr. William Kingsford, the historian, and myself, Sir Daniel remarked in his quiet, quaint way, "I think I am really getting to be an old man, for the other day I was pointed out by some young ladies in the university as that 'dear old man,' Sir Daniel Wilson." Now, when one arrives



at that stage he is old indeed." In the general laugh which followed, both Sir William Dawson and Principal Grant also declared that they had undergone a similar experience. But all insisted that the President of the University of Toronto was the youngest of the party. Left-handed himself, he could use either hand well, and when I mentioned to him that a very young member of my family was addicted to the habit of using the left hand, he said, "Let him use it, don't check him. It is good to be able to employ both." From the first day of its formation he was a strong friend of the Royal Society of Canada. By the fellows of that body he was greatly admired, respected and loved. He attended nearly every meeting, though the sessions often drew him away from his home in the middle of his college work, which pressed for completion. At all meetings, with perhaps two exceptions, he read papers, and added value to the papers of others by the wealth of his own knowledge of the subjects treated. He was a good off-hand speaker, and the humour which frequently enlivened his remarks was refined, delicate and infectious.

Sir Daniel Wilson was, above all things, a manly man, courageous in his conduct as well as in the expression of his opinions. It was not in his nature to shrink before disaster or trouble, or to succumb in the face of trial. When the fire destroyed the college buildings, Sir Daniel was one of the first to go to the scene, saving by his wise direction, life and property, and for hours exhibiting the greatest energy. At about 11 o'clock

he hurried home for a few minutes, saying to his daughter in a brave, cheerful tone, "the old building's gone; but never mind, it wasn't half large enough, and we'll soon have a better one. Get me something, (which he named), and I'll be off again, to make sure it's quite out." Prof. Ashley came in a few minutes later, saying, "oh Mr. President, don't be discouraged." "Discouraged!" replied Sir Daniel, "I should think not, you'll see, we'll soon have a far finer building," and off they went together to do what more there remained to be done. From that moment, not a murmur escaped Sir Daniel's lips, but his whole energy was devoted unceasingly to building up the new edifice, and repairing the great damage which fire and water had done.

University after university granted him the highest academic honours they had to bestow. The various learned societies of Great Britain and America and Canada were proud to enroll his name on their list of members, and in 1888 the Queen, in recognition of his invaluable services to education, science and literature, offered him knighthood. This honour he at first was tempted to decline for reasons personal to himself. But later counsels prevailing he accepted the mark of his Sovereign's appreciation of his work. The limitations to which this paper is subjected precludes ampler treatment of a subject which is full of lessons. It is the story of a beautiful life, useful in its every feature, perfect in its domesticity, simple, unaffected and true.

GEORGE STEWART, D.C.L., LL.D.



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